

## Keeping the water at bay

### Keansburg calls for help to reinforce beach berm

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KEYPORT BUREAU

KEANSBURG — Clamdiggers, waterfront homes balanced on stilts, and storms lashing wind and water off Raritan Bay defined the beachfront John Huber knew as a child.

The construction decades ago of the borough's berm changed all that.

"It took the view of the New York skyline away," said Huber, a 66-year-old Shore Boulevard resident. "However, we haven't had to get out of our houses in boats, or we haven't had to fight erosion on our own property."

Some officials, though, worry that offshore storms and a lack of proper care have weakened the berm and grass-covered sand dunes, and Keansburg may be facing serious problems with beach erosion and local flooding. Those are problems, they say, that demand as much attention from state and federal officials as has been given recently to oceanfront communities in Monmouth and Ocean counties.

There is beach erosion in other parts of the Bayshore as well, said Joe Reynolds, co-chairman of the Bayshore Regional Watershed Council. Union Beach recently applied to the Army Corps of Engineers to replenish its beach. In Keyport, Reynolds said, there are no more existing bathing beaches because there is no more natural shoreline in that area.

"The worst beach erosion, in my opinion, from Aberdeen down to Highlands is the Port Monmouth section of Middletown," Reynolds said. "The Bayshore Waterfront Park is so bad that the dunes are collapsing."

On Ocean County's Long Beach Island, Congress last week had considered trimming a long-awaited beach-replenishment project from the 2006 budget because of a looming budget crunch. However, \$5 million slated for replenishment ultimately survived the chopping block. The state also will add about \$2.5 million in funding for the project, officials have said.

In Keansburg, Councilman George Hoff just wants to make sure Bayshore towns get as much attention as coastal towns do. He fears the state Department of Environmental Protection has set other priorities.

"We need the help also," Hoff said. "That's basically what it comes down to. Is it going to take somebody's house getting flooded because the berm's washed away for somebody to wake up and realize what we need?"

#### Help may be on way

Some officials have taken notice.

The state Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers plan to look at beach conditions and flooding along the Bayshore, a project state Sen. Joseph M. Kyrillos Jr., R-Monmouth, is monitoring, his legislative affairs director said.

Rep. Frank J. Pallone Jr., D-N.J., also said he's concerned about damage to Keansburg's beachfront.

One plan in the works, Pallone said, would provide roughly \$200,000 for the design phase of a beach replenishment project in the borough. While new sand could hit Keansburg's shores in

summer 2007, the project also would benefit neighboring towns, such as Keyport and Middletown.

Hoff and Dennis O'Keefe, who heads Keansburg's public works department, are leading the battle, and one of their biggest weapons may be the beach itself.

As the men walked recently on a battered stretch of the beachfront, they pointed to conditions they said need immediate help: an eroded berm whose base is breaking off in chunks, a large pipe jutting out of the sand, dunes littered with sinkholes announcing the possible deterioration of pipes below them.

O'Keefe said recent storms that ravaged the area's oceanfront beaches also took their toll on Keansburg, where several feet of sand surrounding the berm were washed away, exposing part of a once-buried bulkhead. The berm also has eroded to the point where vehicles that once drove on top of it are now forced to ride on nearby dunes, he added.

"You could come in here with bulldozers and front-end loaders . . . and try to patch this up," said O'Keefe, as he walked near the berm. "High tide? It's gone."

These problems also increase the town's tendency to flood during heavy rainfalls, O'Keefe said. When rainwater can no longer run through pipes into the bay, it remains in the streets.

"We're not trying to make enemies here," Hoff added. "We're trying to make allies . . . so we can come up with a solution to the problem and get it fixed."

Ray Cann, 61, another longtime Shore Boulevard resident, said: "Erosion isn't just a (problem) out in the Sea Bright area and further down. We have our problems here."

Pallone said he hopes to visit Keansburg with the Army Corps of Engineers in the coming weeks to help assess damages from recent storms.

*Staff writer Joe Pike contributed to this story, which also contains material from previous Press stories. Justin Vellucci: (732) 888-2617 or [jvellucci@app.com](mailto:jvellucci@app.com)*

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